

## **SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMISSION**

### **29 JULY 2009**

Present: Councillor Higginbottom (in the Chair)  
Councillors Batey, Hussain, F Khan and Webb

#### **07/09 Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Hird and Poulter.

#### **08/09 Late items introduced by the Chair**

In accordance with Section 100(B) (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the Chair agreed to admit two late reports in connection with:

- Regarding minute 16/09, the Annual work Programme of the Planning and Transportation Commission
- Regarding minute 16/09, the Annual work Programme of the Community Commission.

#### **09/09 Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations interest.

#### **10/09 Call-in**

There were no call-ins to report.

#### **11/09 Councillor Calls for Action**

There were no Councillor Calls for Action to report.

### **Items for Discussion**

#### **12/09 Member Satisfaction Survey**

The Commission considered a report of the Director of Corporate and Adult Services on the Member Satisfaction Survey. It was reported that the survey has been run since 2004 and the results are included in the Annual Report of the Commissions. The survey covers the quality of the support provided by the scrutiny team and the concept of the mechanics of the scrutiny function.

This year 31 members completed and returned their survey forms, which is the highest ever received. The results show a good level of satisfaction with the support provided by the Scrutiny Co-ordination Team but there is poor satisfaction with:

1. The response of the Council Cabinet to Scrutiny Commissions' recommendations;
2. The annual budget scrutiny process;

3. The use of Performance Eye as a tool to support scrutiny;
4. The concept of Overview and Scrutiny; and
5. The profile of Overview and Scrutiny.

Councillor Webb expressed dissatisfaction with the current process for Council Cabinet responses to recommendations of Commissions. He suggested that Cabinet Members should be invited to attend subsequent meetings and explain the reasons behind their positive or negative responses. The Scrutiny Co-ordination Officer stated that there has at times been a delay between recommendations and subsequent responses. However, new legislation seeks to tighten the response time. He suggested that if responses from Council Cabinet were received in a large gap between Commission meetings then these responses could be circulated electronically. The Commission endorsed this proposal.

Councillor Webb stated that Performance Eye would be a much more useful tool to councillors if the information was updated more frequently. It would also be a useful tool if councillors were emailed when an indicator that is of interest to them either changes colour or its direction of travel. The Scrutiny and Complaints Manager stated that this would be very difficult. In order to provide weekly or monthly updates on quarterly reported indicators it would require a complete overhaul of the way that data is collected. The Chair suggested that the Commission could carry out a topic review of Performance Eye to investigate why there are holes in the data.

The Scrutiny and Complaints Manager stated that more could be done to raise the profile of scrutiny and asked for Members' views on this. The Chair stated that the Councillor Call for Actions may have a positive effect on this. Councillor Webb stated that he thought reviews best showed off the work of the Commissions and more should be done to publicise them. He suggested issuing press releases to the media when the reviews are published and providing reporters with someone to contact if they have any questions.

#### **Resolved to:**

1. **Note the report;**
2. **Formally invite Cab members to all Commission meetings;**
3. **Arrange special meetings if necessary to receive and consider responses of Council Cabinet to Commission recommendations;**
4. **Ask HG to attend 28 Sept Scrutiny Management Commission meeting to discuss how best Commission members might access performance information;**
5. **Seek more public involvement in topics; and**
6. **Publicise reviews and outcomes.**

## **13/09 Scrutiny of Crime and Disorder Issues**

The Commission considered a report of the Director of Corporate and Adult Services on the way in which the Council might best discharge its new duties in respect of the scrutiny of matters concerning crime and disorder.

The Chair stated that the Director of the Community Safety Partnership had offered to come and give the Commission a presentation covering all the issues involved in the formation of a Crime and Disorder Sub Commission. The Chair stated that her preferred option would be option 2 which involves the creation of a new sub commission to consider all matters relating to crime and disorder. Councillor Poulter had informed the Chair that he also prefers option 2. However, the Chair said that this may not sit well with

other Members.

Councillor Webb suggested using the next SMC meeting to consider both the budgetary issues of the police and the Community Safety Partnership and the budget of the Council.

The Chair stated that she wanted the Director of the Community Safety Partnership before the Commission discussed this matter further.

**Resolved to hold the 28 September SMC meeting in two parts. The first part which would start at 5pm would be a Crime and Disorder Committee meeting and the second part, which would start at 6.30pm would be the normal business meeting of the Commission. There would be a buffet in the meeting room from 6.15 to 6.30pm.**

## 14/09      Petitions

Members considered a report of the Director of Corporate and Adult Services requesting the Commission to appoint representatives to the Scrutiny Management Commission Petitions Sub Commission, a draft Corporate Petitions Procedure and received an update on a petition received by the Regeneration and Community Directorate relating to the withdrawal of home to school transport.

It was reported that the draft Corporate Petitions Procedure had been withdrawn prior to the meeting.

The Scrutiny and Complaints Manager informed the Commission that the subject of the petition had been considered by two joint meetings of the Children and Young People Commission and the Planning and Transportation Commission. The petition has also been considered by the Council Cabinet and has been called in. The lead petitioner has been made aware of the actions taken by the Council and has spoken at a meeting on the matter.

### **Resolved:**

- A. To appoint Councillors Hird, Higginbottom and Webb to the Scrutiny Management Commission Petitions Sub Commission; and**
- B. To note receipt of the School Transport petition and the action taken.**

## 15/09      Finance Sub Commission

It was reported that a survey into Members satisfaction with the scrutiny process had revealed that a large proportion had indicated that they are dissatisfied with the budget scrutiny process. The Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordination Officer stated that he had researched possible alternatives to the current process and Members had previously opted for the Northamptonshire County Council (NCC) model. The Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordination Officer informed the meeting that he had contacted officers at NCC to see if their model was compatible using either three or five Members in a Sub Commission. This was because NCC uses a much higher number of Members than even the full Scrutiny Management Commission. The Scrutiny Co-ordination Officer proposed two formats for a Finance Sub Commission. One would require the formation of a formally approved sub commission and the other approach would be to form an informal cross party working group.

Councillor Hussain expressed concern with the formation of another sub commission. He suggested that the Scrutiny Management Commission (SMC) could instead hold more meetings. He stated that the information currently provided to councillors does not provide the complete financial picture of the Council unless you have a background in accountancy. Normally 85 percent of the budget is already spoken for and it is the discretionary spending that would be of the greatest interest to the commissions. The Cabinet receives a report detailing the over and underspends for the financial year. He suggested that it would be useful for this commission to view this report and compare the performance of the Council against any savings made.

Councillor Webb stated that the Commission had met the Corporate Director of Resources and given him some suggestions about the current scrutiny of the budget process. He said that until the Director reports back to the Commission it will be difficult to decide the future for this process. He stated that the Director had seemed very open to scrutiny adding value to the budgetary process and shared the Commission's view that scrutiny of the budget should be conducted openly and in public.

The Assistant Director of Democratic Services suggested an alternative model to SMC. He stated that the leaders and the deputy leaders of the political groups are key to this process. Instead of a sub commission, the chairs of the scrutiny commissions and the leaders and deputy leaders of the political groups group meet and discuss the budget. The political group leaders could then take the budget proposals back to their groups and discuss their priorities and then feed this back to SMC. Councillor F Khan expressed concern that this would politicise the process even more than it already is and stifle backbenchers.

The Commission agreed that the information current supplied to Commissions on the budget is neither comprehensive enough nor easily accessible.

Councillor Web expressed concern that the Commissions were not getting the same amount of information on the budget as the Council Cabinet and asked for this to be remedied.

Councillor Hussain stated that all the other Commissions consider the budgetary provisions under their remit and then it is referred to SMC. He suggested that SMC does not need this second review of their portfolio areas and should only concentrate on the areas that concern SMC.

**Resolved to recommend Scrutiny Co-ordination Officers to report back to the Commission with the findings of this review to a future meeting of the Scrutiny Management Commission.**

## **16/09      2009/10 Workplan**

The Commission considered the 2009/10 workplan and in addition the workplans of the Community Commission and the Planning and Transportation Commission. Members were asked to authorise the Climate Change Commission to conduct a review on 'Climate Change – The Challenge for householders' which is in the Community Commission's remit.

**Resolved:**

**A. To approve the 2009/10 Workplans; and**

**B. To authorise the Climate Change Commission to conduct a review of 'Climate Change – The Challenge for Householders.'**

**17/09      Performance Eye**

There were reports on any performance indicators for the Commission to consider.

**18/09      Forward Plan**

There were no requests for reports on any of the items.

**19/09      Retrospective Scrutiny**

There were no items of retrospective scrutiny to report.

**20/09      Matters referred to the Commission by Council Cabinet**

There were no items referred to the Commission by Council Cabinet to report.

**21/09      Responses of the Council Cabinet to the  
recommendations and reports of the Commission**

There were no responses of the Council Cabinet to the recommendations and reports of the Commission.

Chair of the next ensuing meeting  
at which these minutes were signed